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**Short paper**

**At the intersection between organizational stability and change: a study on music  
festivals**

Maria Laura Toraldo

Post-doctoral Researcher

Department People, Organizations and Society

Grenoble Ecole de Management

12 rue Pierre Sépard

38000 Grenoble - France

Gazi Islam

Associate Professor

Department People, Organizations and Society

Grenoble Ecole de Management

12 rue Pierre Sépard

38000 Grenoble - France

Email: [Gazi.Islam@grenoble-em.com](mailto:Gazi.Islam@grenoble-em.com)

Gianluigi Mangia

Associate Professor

Department of Economics Management and Institutions

University Federico II of Naples

Via Cinthia - Complesso Universitario Monte S. Angelo

80126 – Naples -Italy

## **Introduction**

The temporary breaking of social order can be seen as a device for social organising (Durkheim, 1964). Organizational and management scholars have recognised the tension between order and disorder, stability and disruption as a crucial mechanisms for systemic-maintenance of organizational life (e.g. Thietart and Forgues, 1995). For instance, tensions and oscillations between chaotic moments and stability can promote organizational change insofar as change results from competing tension among extremes (Eisenhardt, 2000). Similarly, much attention has been devoted to temporary micro-disruptions of the status quo within organizations, such as irony, cynicism, or paradox (Hatch and Sanford, 1993; Eisenhardt, 2000; Fleming and Spicer, 2007). What these studies have in common is a recognition of the role of the reversal of what is considered conventional as an important part of organizational life.

Organized events such as festivals, carnivals, and other moments of collective euphoria provide occasions in which the paradoxes of reversal and social order are particularly acute (Smith and Stewart, 2001). Festivals, by providing a situated, embodied setting for action, have a performative aspect, reinforcing social and organizational norms (Falassi, 1987). However, festivals also may embody notions of the ‘carnavalesque’, flouting norms and creating spaces for imagining new forms of community (Cremona, 2007). By studying the contradictory tendencies toward order, on the one hand, and inversion, on the other, festivals provide a window into organizational processes of stability and change more generally.

While the term ‘event’ covers a constellation of very different social occasions – f.e. carnivals, festivals, ceremonies, and so on – studies on events are particularly interesting in presenting the micro-dimension or the ‘lifeworlds of local actors’ (Falassi, 1987). In fact, being played at the communitarian level, events provide a space for collective symbolic action, originated from below. On these lines, the local situated connotation of events has been lately re-emphasised across the literature on Field-Configuring Events (e.g. Hardy and Maguire, 2010; Lampel and Mayer, 2008). Specifically, field configuring events (Lampel and Meyer, 2008) have been described as possessing a dual character. On the one hand, they play a key role in consolidating particular fields of action. By contrast, it is also acknowledged that field configuring events may act as mechanisms for social change (Hardy and Maguire, 2010), thus providing transformative spaces for action. For us, this duality is of crucial

interest since it reveals that mechanisms of consolidation and transformation are both key in organizational dynamics.

In effect, this tension between system-transformational functions and system-consolidation functions has been particularly investigated with reference to rituals (Islam and Zyphur, 2008). Smith and Stuart, (2011) consider organizational rituals as symbolic practices or communal rites whose function is to confirm social structures and roles.

This paper shall use the concept of events to show that micro-situations - as mechanisms of consolidation and transformation - are both key in explaining stability and change. In doing so, we turn the attention to mechanisms that allow for promoting progressive change or for reproductions of social institutions. In particular, as microdynamics are permeated by emotions (Creed et al., 2014), we will look at emotions as mechanisms that are channelled for promoting progressive actions or for inducing conservative situations. During ritual moments, emotions become particularly manifest. As observed by Anand and Watson (2004), rituals enable participants 'experience social euphoria, or the joy of participating in mass social occasions' (p. 60). In other words, ritual episodes engender collective emotional energy that spreads via the interaction of participants. To this end, this paper attempts to understand the extent to which emotional energy - generated during ritual situations - is used for accomplishing different institutional objectives. Accordingly, the research questions that the paper aims to address are: in which way rituals are used for producing emotional energy? and how does that energy gets directed for fostering progressive or conservative actions that go beyond the confines of the rituals themselves?

The current paper contributes to the literature on processes of stability and change in a number of ways. First, it shows that microdynamics – like those taking place at events – can be explained as operating on a dual level: as system reinforcing and system-transformational of both social actions and structures. Second, it demonstrates that the socially embedded nature of emotions enables the activation of emotional energy and its application towards diverse social aims. From this perspective, mechanisms of institutional maintenance and transformation are influenced by how emotional energy is directed. The paper contributes to the organizational studies literature that recognise the relevance of emotions, responding to the call to include emotions to explain the constitution of social orders.

The setting for this paper is the festivals business, where we investigate the extent to which the emotional energy generated during these events is differently activated and channelled by companies variously involved in this business. The interesting aspect is that

one of the central mechanisms that characterise festivals is the emotional arousal generated (Smith and Stuart, 2011). In particular, we argue that during these moments emotional energy is engendered and this is mostly evident in contexts in which temporary communities can form and quickly disband.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section, drawing on the literature on events, explores rituals and ritual-like activities and the micro-level dynamics that take place in these contexts. The second section focuses on how emotional energy is activated during ritual moments, focusing on how this energy is used for promoting progressive action or for reproducing existing institutions. It then investigates how festivals – seen as ritual events – engender this emotional energy, using an ethnographic in-situ investigation. By drawing on a perspective that frames emotion as fundamental for constituting social meanings, the paper explores how emotional energy is harnessed for reinforcing social situations or deployed for progressive endeavours.

### **A window on events**

An initially fragmented number of studies on managing cultural manifestations, such as festivals, carnivals, celebrations, etc. have originated within a body of knowledge known as event management. Getz et al. (2010) observe that a majority of studies have adopted a management-focused perspective and they have focused on studying economic and financial impacts, marketing, sponsorship, and management. Such managerial considerations have been juxtaposed with a “social perspective on festivals, such as that of allowing a community to reflect its identity or to attain recognition” (Cremona, 2007: 7). For example, McDonnel et al., (1999) observe that events are ‘specific rituals . . . or celebrations that are consciously planned and created to mark special occasions and to achieve particular social, cultural or corporate goals’ (p. 17). Furthermore, event-related research has variously recognised that ‘events are occasions for (re)affirming or contesting the social order’ (Whitford, 2013).

The dual aspect of events as both affirmative and challenging of current orders aligns this literature with emerging perspective on rituals and field configuration in organizational scholarship. Lampel and Mayer (2008) notice that field configuring events are temporary spaces that allows for constructing, interpreting and transforming institutional and professional fields. For instance, the literature on field configuring events (e.g. Lampel and Mayer, 2008) has characterized such events as having a limited duration within specific settings, where they ‘provide unstructured opportunities for social interaction’, ‘include ceremonial and dramaturgical activities’, and ‘generate social resources’ that are used

afterwards (p. 1027). Highlighting the ceremonial and dramaturgical definition of events, we emphasize the ritual aspects of such events and the twofold role of consolidation and transformation. In fact, one of the main functions of ritual is the creation and maintenance of social structure (e.g. Durkheim, 1961). In effect, a definition of organizational rites is provided by Islam and Zyphur (2009): ‘a form of social action in which a group’s values and identity are publicly demonstrated or enacted in a stylized manner, within the context of a specific occasion or event’ (p. 116). This definition points out two important aspects. First, the communitarian dimensions within which rites are performed, where rituals act as social cohesion mechanism, confirming values shared by the group. The second point, based on the temporary dimension of rituals, involves the immediacy and imminence of ritual performances. However, even if rituals support the maintenance of social order, their capacity to activate change has been also recognised. Renewal and change of status quo of structures and norms becomes manifest as ritual episodes unfold.

The concept of episode has important ramifications for explaining how organization can change. Not only do episodes create a temporary suspension within which organizations can create moments for change, but also through the suspension of established structure, a space for spontaneous development is created (Hendry and Seidl, 2003). In this vein, as episodic moments, rituals can be understood as temporal points in which structures are suspended and replaced. However, the question of how the promotion of progressive actions or the reproduction of existing norms occurs, lead us to explore a key mechanism by means of which these effects are achieved: i.e. the emotional energy.

The idea of emotional energy has been brought to popular attention by the work of Randall Collins (2004), who defines it as: a long-term level of enthusiasm, personal strength, social connectedness and willingness to initiate interaction. In particular, emotional energy has been discussed in the context of ritual events (Collins, 2004), where emotional arousal is generated from the collective performance of ritual practices (ibid., 2004).

In studying how the emotional energy is engendered during ritual like activities, Collins (2004) argues that emotional energy results from ‘physical encounters’. In particular, when ‘human bodies’ are together in the same place, there is an intensification of the shared experience (von Scheve, 2013) which leads to the elicitation of collective emotions. Insofar as emotions are deeply embedded in the social context from which these are originated, it becomes interesting to explore how emotional energy is aroused and directed by the institutional milieu. In other words, it becomes key to understand how emotional energy is

promoted in contexts that are bracketed off from the normal, and how collective activities within these spaces become emotionally charged.

### **Research settings and methods**

As part of the broader field of events, the festival industry is worth to investigate for several reasons. First, as increasing market-driven nature of these events has grown, counterculture and the carnivalesque imaginary associated with festivals have mobilised for commercial interests (Chen, 2009). The relevance of music festivals in economic terms makes it a growing business within the event industry (Financial Times, 2011)

Second festivals represent a good locus to explore processes of transformation/maintenance of order. Festivals are evocative of counterculture ideals and they mobilise a collective imaginary associated with subversive experiences.

The research is based on a multi-sited ethnographic investigation in three different music festivals in the United Kingdom (Latitude Festival, Camp Bestival and Reading Festival). Festivals were accessed via volunteers' suppliers, which were providing various services to festivals: recycling and composting service and bar services. Suppliers of services were chosen privileging the variety in their legal structure. As such both for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises were included in the analysis. This enabled to gain an understanding of how emotional energy is differently activated by these enterprises for pursuing different objectives.

This focus on experienced emotion in action led us to adopt an ethnographic approach, to emphasize the lived experiences of participants. (Atkinson et al., 1983). We extensively relied on oral accounts and telling of participants taking part in these festivals. Listening to what participants say about their involvement with the community and how they perceive their emotional involvement entails engaging in informal conversations with diverse participants.

The first author was recruited by services' providers to work as a volunteer during the so-called Summer Music Festival Season in the UK, in July and August 2012. Each festival lasted from a minimum of 4 days to a maximum of 7 days. She went through the all process of recruitment and training before working in these festivals as a bartender for two different providers (a for-profit organisation and a non-for-profit organisation) and as litter picker for a non-for-profit organisation.

The data were produced through the use of a diary where the researcher (s) manually recorded, for each day, notes on conversations that she had or she listened to. Some of the

notes were written while the researcher was working with fellow volunteers while others were written afterwards starting from the jottings taken down.

The fieldwork was complemented by interviews with managers of the different organizations involved in the services supply. Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours and were tape-recorded. For each organisation, data were gathered through semi-structured interviewing with top managers, where respondents were asked questions on processes and procedures of volunteers' management.

### **Expected Findings and Conclusions**

Although the above analyses are ongoing, preliminary observations involve various reflections on the activation of emotional energy during ritual moments.

Based around feelings of togetherness and community, participants feel together and enjoy themselves during the festival. As emerged from the observations, they engage in temporary relationships, where the emotive dimension of participating in a summer celebration as in-crowd, making friends and hang out with them is pivotal to generate energy. Losing the sense of self by becoming part of the collective celebration seems at the core of these ritual moments where the emotional energy validates the collective identity. However, the arousal of emotional energy is not free from controversy. In fact, several contemporary phenomena, as festivals, carnivals and the like, are only partially mindful of the universal dimension achieved through community engagement. Instead, it seems that in many contemporary ritual-like situations rather than universal, becomes gradually particularistic and this raises questions on the systems of domination that lies behind activities apparently spontaneous, whereas, instead, the communitarian dimensions is purposefully recreated and choreographed to generate emotion – as with the case of the emotional energy.

In the full paper, we expect to gain an elaborate picture of the use of emotional energy and how this energy is fostered and encouraged by suppliers for different purposes.

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